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Lacunae: Narrative "Lacks, Holes or Gaps" in Faulkner's and Morrison's Novels

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Lacunae: Narrative "Lacks, Holes or Gaps"
in
Faulkner's and Morrison's Novels
(TITLE)

BY

Phyllis Ann Karpus

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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(Reader)

(Graduate Coordinator)

(Department Chair)

Date July 25, 2003

Faulkner was asked what approach he would suggest for those readers who had read his writing two or three times and still could not understand it.

His response: "Read it four times."

From an interview with Jean Stein early 1956. (See *List of Works Cited.)*

ABSTRACT

The moment a reader opens a book, turns to the opening lines and begins to read, a circular relationship immediately develops with the author and the text. An implied alliance is formed wherein the author, most often through a narrator, omniscient or otherwise, proposes to the reader that he/she accept a degree of responsibility for understanding the plot, theme, and the underlying meaning in the work.

Retrospectively the theory sounds simple and, with many authors, it is effective. William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, however, not only command but also demand, the reader's absolute attention in, and responsibility to, many of their respective works if he/she wants to gain an understanding of their fiction. They accomplish this end by leaving narrative lacunae--gaps--in their stories that cause great consternation for their readers. They refrain from an overabundance of words in describing every act and thought within every characters. They leave gaps or holes for their readers to fall into challenging them to bring their imaginations into the work.

The lacunae usually cause conflict in word-to-deed and deed-to-word dichotomies among the characters. However, as in the instance of Joe Christmas in Faulkner's Light in August, the conflicting lacuna can be lodged within the characters themselves. The question of Joe Christmas' race creates a conflicting black-to-white dichotomy and remains unanswered by Faulkner even to the end of the book. The reader must carefully interpret Faulkner's intentions in each passage

and reach his/her assumption without ever learning the truth.

Morrison refers to the lacunae she presents in her novels as "holes or spaces." She admits she purposely controls her language or use of words to describe her characters' every thought and action in order to leave a hole for her readers to fall into. And Faulkner readily admitted he did not write so that every "idiot" could understand his meaning.

Faulkner's and Morrison's ability to create lacunae in their novels offers an excellent opportunity for a discussion of this theory as it applies in many of their novels. The underlying meaning, of course, rests in the reader's imagination.

DEDICATION

- **To my beloved husband, Bud. He willingly sacrificed time with me because he understood my intense desire to succeed and gave me the freedom and independence to chase my dream. What wonderful, loving gifts for a husband to give his wife.**

- **To my beautiful son, Michael, who died shortly after his father. He had wonderful words of advice for me always: "If this is what you want, Mom, go for it!"**

- **To Mark, my son the attorney, who still believes I should have gone to law school.**

- **To Janean who gave me my wonderful Tony and Ben.**

- **To Chris, who worries about me too much but has always understood the *why*.**

- **To Amy who gave me two more gifts, Kate and Sammy.**

- **To my beautiful daughter, Kathy, who will have to read this Thesis to understand how she has always filled the gap in the word-to-deed dichotomy of my life.**

- **To Tony, my first grandson, whose innocence and love made me smile when I fought back tears.**

- **To Ben, who walks in his grandfather's image and can make me laugh and cry at the same time.**

- **To my angel, Kate, who doesn't care if I sing.**

- **To Sam, my tractor man, who lets me read <u>Green Eggs and Ham</u> upside down. Perhaps I should have taken that approach with Faulkner.**

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To Dr. John Guzlowski, who directed my Thesis, and Drs. Anne Zahlan, and Bill Searle, who accepted the roles of Readers: I wish I had either Faulkner's or Morrison's talent for expressing their thoughts in language in order to say thank you. However:

John:

Thank you for showing me the grace and beauty in the works of Faulkner and Morrison. Addie Bundren has been a beacon for me as I worked through their novels and you guided the light. Also, I am greatly relieved that I won't ever have to sit through the challenge of another of your mid-terms or finals.

Anne:

You have been a significant part of two of the most important challenges of my college career: My Honors Thesis and this, my Masters Thesis. Thank you. I treasure the friendship you and David have offered over the past few years. Maybe some day I can make it to a Durrell conference.

Bill:

Will you ever forgive me for my comment on <u>Prospero's Books</u>. You are the only professor who assigned me 20 minutes and let me talk for an hour and a half. I believe I was chosen by some strange muse to pull that very special piece of paper from all the works we covered in that class. Also, I believe I owe you about 10 pounds for all the peanut butter cups over the years.

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Introduction

Literary criticism can be viewed as interpretation of a literary text or the underlying meaning in the text. As the title of his book--The Range of Interpretation--suggests, Wolfgang Iser distinguishes among different modes of interpretation. His discussions are primarily related to three different forms which are complicated in their rhetoric. They return to a basic premise, however: That the modes interplay with each other and, according to Iser:

> **. . . what makes their interplay so important is the necessity to negotiate the liminal space opened up by any act of interpretation. The space is liminal because it demarcates the subject matter from the register [i.e. the form into which interpretation is translated] and thus is not identical to either. The play among the modes turns out to be the interface through which the liminal space is negotiated and out of which something emerges. (xiv)**

I believe Iser is, fundamentally, saying that there is a conscious awareness of a gap in understanding between the text and the reader that must be negotiated.

This gap, or "liminal space" as Iser refers to it, " . . . reveals early on in history the nature of interpretation as an iteration of translatability. And this is due to the fact that texts in and of themselves do not legislate the conditions of their own reader, although each text can only come to life through being read" (19). I understand him to mean that, as readers, if we can negotiate the gaps between the reader and the text, we each derive different, individual interpretations from a text. In addition, interpretative gaps must be crossed and re-crossed by the individual reader in order for him to reach an understanding of the text.

Within the bounds of Iser's "self-reflective circularity" method of interpretation are two interlinking methods as defined by Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher and cited by Iser: The divinatory and comparative methods. Iser quotes Schleiermacher in reference to these two offshoots:

> [The] divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual. The comparative method proceeds by subsuming the author under a general type. It then tries to find his distinctive traits by comparing him with the others of the same type. (50)

The language in the theory is somewhat confounding but an understanding can be reached by grasping the meaning held in the gap between the reader and Iser. This explication of Iser's complicated approach to interpreting a text is oversimplified and perhaps over read. However, a reader must, of course, get involved in the text in order to reach a comprehension of the author and what he may be trying to say. Once the reader has reached this plateau, he/she can then

uncover other authors who use similar literary or narrative devices in their works and set out to interpret and compare those works and techniques. The challenge for literary criticism is the reader's responsibility of sorting through the many devices which can subsume any text and single out one for interpretation and discussion. I have certainly simplified, or perhaps oversimplified, Iser's theories. My basic interpretation of his thoughts offers an excellent introduction to my theoretical discussion of narrative gaps in the novels of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison.

Iser uses the term "liminal" to define the gap the reader must cross to reach an understanding of an author and his/her text. In discussing Faulkner's and Morrison's texts, I prefer to use the term "lacuna" rather than Iser's "liminal" to describe any gaps the reader encounters in these authors' fiction. Lacuna, according to the Oxford American Dictionary, is "a gap, a section missing from a book or argument, etc." (495). It also can be juxtaposed with many other words. In an interview, Morrison uses the words "holes" or "spaces" to describe the lacunae she leaves in her narratives for her readers to fall into. Faulkner uses the word "lacks" to describe those moments in As I Lay Dying when Addie Bundren explains how the other characters' words and deeds fail to relate one to the other.

The foregoing prefaces my discussion of one of the many elements to be discovered in the narrative structures or styles of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison: Both authors possess the creativity that enables them to form lacunae or empty spaces in their narratives which command their readers' attention and

participation. Once the reader discovers a lacuna or a gap, he/she must bring imagination into focus to comprehend the underlying meaning in the passages. These narrational lacunae, which I may refer to interchangeably as lacks, holes, spaces or gaps are inherent in, and contribute to, the rich narration in their novels. An often-encountered predicament in the two authors' narratives takes place when the gaps often broaden and deepen into chasms or crevasses. The lacunae take different skeletal forms within the narrative structure: The gap may be in a word to deed dichotomy or, in the alternative, between the deed and the language, between characters. It can be within the characters themselves. An an example, in Faulkner's Light in August, Joe Christmas wavers between the white and Negro worlds, caught in a racial abyss teetering between an unknowing of his blackness or whiteness. He exists in a space which cannot be filled. Conversely, Morrison's Milkman Dead acknowledges his racial background but cannot understand the depth of his heritage. Faulkner and Morrison rely upon their readers to reach beneath the narrative surface in order to gain an understanding of the conflict going on within the character and the text.

The narrative complexities surrounding and/or underlying characters such as Faulkner's Joe Christmas and Morrison's Milkman Dead often subliminally reflect their beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies toward their writing and contribute immeasurably to their individual styles. This discussion would lack integrity without also offering insight into their perceived thoughts or, as Iser defined the divinatory method of interpretation, if we don't gain a comprehension of the

writers themselves. I will uncover many similarities as well as dissimilarities in their philosophies and works which hopefully will substantiate the growing trend among literary critics and theorists in comparing their works.

Faulkner and Morrison on Writing

Faulkner, addressing students of an undergraduate course at the University of Virginia in 1957, was asked if he believed a writer has the prerogative to create his own language–to go against vernacular. Faulkner responded: "He has the right to do that provided he don't insist on anyone understanding it." He then paraphrased Walt Whitman as having said: "To have good poets we must have good readers, too" (Faulkner in the University 52). Summing up his thoughts on writers, their language and readers' acceptance of that language, he told the students:

> **Well, the writer, actually, that's an obligation he assumes with his vocation, that he's going to write in a way that people can understand it. He doesn't have to write it in the way that every idiot can understand it–every imbecile in the third grade can understand it, but he's got to use a language which is accepted and in which the words have specific meanings that everybody agrees on. (52-53)**

The initial reading of The Sound and the Fury, Go Down, Moses, or Absalom, Absalom! (without a genealogical sketch) can so bewilder a reader that he/she feels like Faulkner's "idiot" or Morrison's Deweys in Sula. Passages must be read and reread many times in order to ascertain the meaning lodged beneath the surface in narrative lacunae or language gaps which more often than not seem like great chasms. In "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," Conrad Aiken criticizes what he calls Faulkner's "bad habits and the wilful bad writing," but

defends his style from the reader's standpoint. He explains:

> **[Faulkner's] style, especially when allied with such a *concern* for method must make difficulties for the reader . . . . Mr. Faulkner does little or nothing . . . to make his highly complex "situation" easily available or perceptible. The reader must simply make up his mind to go to work, and in a sense cooperate; his reward being that there *is* a situation to be given shape, a meaning to be extracted . . . . (142-143)**

Aiken's statements support the idea that Faulkner, if not intentionally, certainly artfully, created narratives filled with lacunae which draw the reader's attention into them. To bridge these narrative gaps, the reader must, as Aiken suggests, "cooperate," or literarily slip into the gap and often struggle to rise to the challenge of uncovering the meaning hidden beneath the narrative in the text.

Like Faulkner, Toni Morrison effectively challenges reader involvement in her texts. She was born the year after Faulkner's third novel, <u>As I Lay Dying</u>, was published. Her first novel, <u>The Bluest Eye</u>, was published in 1970, forty years after <u>As I Lay Dying</u>. The span of years between the works is of no significance; I cite it only as a means to compare and/or contrast the relevance of the two writers and their texts, one to the other irrespective of the decades that lie between them. In her novels, Morrison authenticates her empathy with Faulkner's philosophy toward writing and language. (Their philosophies are an integral part of this discussion and will be examined throughout.) Morrison expressed her attitude toward her writing style in a 1983 interview with Claudia Tate of <u>Black Women Writers at</u>

Work. Although her language differs from Faulkner's in his talk with the university students, a similar underlying tone or theme remains, i.e. the reader's importance and responsibility to the individual works:

> The language has to be quiet; it has to engage your participation. I never describe characters very much. My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just telling the story; it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. (Conversations with Toni Morrison 164)

Morrison's concern with language and how the reader responds to it, is evident in the above passage. Faulkner experimented with language in his works, often combining words to create a vernacular of his own. In many of his works, he exploited words to show the helplessness or hopelessness that they, or the lack of them, effected in his characters and in their relationships. In As I Lay Dying, Addie Bundren paradoxically turns to and against words in unburdening her unhappiness by attacking words. Although Addie, her death, and the pilgrimage to Jefferson to bury her are the focus of the work, of the fifty-nine interior monologues, Faulkner allocates her only one. Perhaps it is her attack upon words and the significance of the attack which influenced Faulkner to allow her only the one section. This broaches the question: Is Faulkner afraid of what he will reveal about his own attitudes toward language?

I don't believe his attitude toward language challenged or even distressed him. His attitude toward, or belief in mankind, and how he, as a writer, could bring the realities of man's emotions to his readers in a way they can understand were important to him. His readers represent a circular, two-fold challenge to Faulkner: First, on the surface, his desire to survive from a monetary standpoint. If he could not write in a way that his reading audience can understand, his works will not sell and, as he often did, he would have to seek other ways to raise money to feed his family. His letters to his editors often reflect this need. Beneath the narrative surface remains that desire or need to bring people to an understanding of, as he puts it, "the flesh-and-blood, suffering anguishing human beings" (FU 47). In an essay entitled, "Faulkner's Moral Vision," Lawrance Thompson commingles Faulkner's thoughts with the themes and attitudes in his novels to develop what he believes was his moral vision. He reinforces the theory that Faulkner's primary concern in his writing was the realities of man's life, good or bad:

> When Faulkner says that the only subject worth writing about is the problem of the human heart in conflict with itself, that metaphor implies his own capacity for recognizing that good must be born of evil, man being man, and that evil keeps getting born of good, for the same reason. (William Faulkner 165)

Language and an extreme gift of creative talent are the tools Faulkner had available with which to create plausible characters, not in his own image or imagined image, but as he perceived his fellow man in everyday life. He was asked

whether he was symbolically depicting a battle between the North and South in "A Rose for Emily." He replied that the symbolism is incidental to what a writer attempts to achieve in his/her works. He said that if a writer "could write the authentic, credible flesh-and-blood character and at the same time deliver the message, maybe he would, but I don't believe any writer is capable of doing both, that he's got to chose one of the two: either he is delivering a message or he's trying to create flesh-and-blood, living, suffering, anguishing human beings" (FITU 47). Later in this essay, I will discuss how Morrison's philosophy differs greatly from Faulkner's on this topic. Faulkner believed in the natural man and his ability to survive the forces of good and evil, or a combination thereof, and only through his works could he bring man's conditions to his readers.

Edmond Volpe in his book on Faulkner, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, maintains that "Faulkner's greatness as an artist is due to a great extent to what might be called stereoscopic vision, his ability to deal with the specific and the universal simultaneously, to make the real symbolic without sacrificing reality" (28). Later in his essay, he says that "Faulkner's passion for exactness and his almost compulsive need to make words convey not only the image or thought in his mind but the related feelings or mood also contributed to the complexity of his style" (41).

Words: Addie Bundren's "Shapes" to Fill the "Lacks"

Addie Bundren's interior monologue in As I Lay Dying is a compassionate statement from a woman surrounded by people who professed and talked about love but were incapable of openly demonstrating love during her lifetime. To Addie, her family and friends' demonstrations of love were nonexistent or at least overwhelmed with talking rather than acting. Words are a paradox to Addie because a parallelism exists in the word-to-deed dichotomy that she believes hopelessly cannot be "straddled." What Faulkner accomplishes by limiting Addie's voice to only a single chapter is to emphasize the anguish of her life while those around her move through the days following her death. Perhaps the most futile irony of the work is the love shown to Addie after death that she did not recognize in life.

It's not necessarily words that frustrate Addie, but the way they are used. The word "love," she says, "was like the others; just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came you wouldn't need a word for that any more than for pride or fear" (AILD 464). The lack, to Addie, during her life is the lacuna in her relationship with her husband--the deep chasm between the word and the deed. She would:

> **. . . think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle one to**

> the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot until they forget the words. (465)

Faulkner challenges the literary imagination through complicating language. On one hand, his use of long, unpunctuated sentences in interior monologues or stream of consciousness narratives emphasizes his characters' emotional upheaval and commands the reader's explicit attention. Conversely, he often is succinct and laconic: "MY MOTHER IS A FISH" (AILD 398). He certainly does not diminish the challenge to his reader simply through a paucity of words; the onus is put on the reader to accept the responsibility of ascertaining meaning. Faulkner need not explain that young Vardaman's experience with death has been only with animals and fish: Thus he relates to death and thus "MY MOTHER IS A FISH." Faulkner relies on his non-idiot readers to bring meaning to the passage.

Morrison, contrary to many of Faulkner's works, presents generally straightforward, quiet, often rhythmic narratives which also challenge the reader. Because her language is not so complicated as Faulkner's, the meaning in her works lies closer to the surface of the text. Faulkner often draws attention to, and emphasizes the importance of words–or lack of them--as he does with Addie, which ultimately negates the need for words and lets the reader know how ineffectual words can be. Morrison, however, allows a silent knowing to permeate her texts through a lack of words. She told an interviewer that she does not want the language to compete with the event itself.

The Unbridgable Gaps in Sula

The relationships between characters in Morrison's Sula can, in many instances, be juxtaposed with Addie Bundren's frustrations and desires. The close relationship between Sula and Nel in Part I represents the ideal Addie sought. In the beginning, it bordered on the ethereal in that Morrison describes them as having "made each other's acquaintance in the delirium of their noon dreams" (51). On the back steps in the quiet atmosphere surrounding her house, Nel dreams of a fiery prince who will rescue her from the somber silence of her life. "But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes" (51). In contrast to Nel's quiet household, Sula lives in a house enveloped in chaos and noise. She retreats to her grandmother's attic amid a "household of throbbing disorder," and "behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of someone who shared both the taste and the speed .... Their meeting," the narrator tells us, "was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on," and "they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). The foundation of the childhood friendship was close familiarity not the need to communicate through the language of words.

Rachel Lee, in her essay on "Missing Peace in Morrison's Sula and Beloved," describes the passage from Sula in which Nel and Sula dig identical holes in the earth "until the two holes were one and the same" (58). The girls' voices are silent as they work together–the "implications being," according to Lee, "that

words would disrupt the unity of action . . . the necessity for words indicates a lesser degree of intimacy" (573). The intimacy Nel and Sula share symbolizes and epitomizes the intimacy Addie sought in relationships with anyone or everyone who touched her everyday life. Morrison reinforces Addie's word-to-deed philosophy in Nel's and Sula's relationship. The girls' intimacy with each other bridges any gaps in their friendship. The passage also supports the theory that words aren't always necessary to express emotions and the deed often transcends the word. Lee reinforces the unity of the girls by stating, " . . . the two women's history has been marked by an uncanny unison of thinking and movement that does not require words" (573).

In Part One of Sula, Morrison restricts the dialogue between Sula and Nel to a few short phrases in the passage following Chicken Little's drowning. The cohesive intimacy of the girls–their oneness–transcends any necessity for words; the word-to-deed dichotomy harmonizes in the girls simply being together. Part I closes on the day of Nel's marriage to Jude and Sula's departure from the Bottom. The two events, occurring within hours of each other, signal to the reader that there is not only the spatial gap between the women with Sula's departure, but also a metaphorical gap in their intimacy with each other.

Upon Sula's return after a ten-year absence, she and Nel resume their friendship and Morrison develops a more open dialogue between them. The resumption of the friendship results in betrayal–Nel discovers Jude, and Sula naked together in her bedroom. Isolated, silent years pass between the women after the

incident until Nel visits the dying Sula and summons up the courage to ask why she betrayed her. The moments when they worked in quiet unison to dig a simple hole are overwhelmed by another act–infidelity–and Sula, in her singularity and evilness, cannot offer the words to solace Nel. She only widens the gap between them by telling Nel, "It matters, Nel, but only to you. Not to anybody else" (144). The cohesive intimacy they share in Part One slips quietly into a chasm of isolated silence in Part Two and words cannot fill the gap. The intimacy the girls had shared ended when the words began.

Faulkner, a white male from the South with limited college education (according to his biographer, Joseph Blotner, he left college his Freshman year to join the RAF and possibly returned later), created stories of primarily white families in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, with the African American characters lingering in the margins of his works.

Toni Morrison, an African American woman from Ohio, well educated with her Masters Degree, writes about her native culture with the white community living on the fringe. Both authors have been honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature; Faulkner for the 1949 Prize and Morrison in 1993. Although their topics differ, their respective narrative styles share a commonality–both authors expect their readers to become involved in their works and accept a degree of responsibility in ascertaining any underlying meaning. Each author, in his or her own way and seemingly effortlessly, creates lacks or holes in their narratives. The reader then must draw from his/her imagination to fill in these metaphorical

abysses.

In a discussion of Faulkner's and Morrison's individual writing styles, we cannot dismiss the obvious differences of race, sex, education and even the decades passed between their works. However, these differences seem to meld together in the shadows when one critiques their novels. What is of utmost importance to this discussion of structures in their novels is the relationship they create between the text and the reader and, ultimately, the reader's growing awareness of the language and meaning of the text. Both authors refrain from a superfluous use of words as descriptions for every act, deed, or motivation within their characters. In so doing, they create narrative lacunae, those gaps or lacks or holes that the reader must attempt to bridge to reach an understanding of the text. They share an authorial intimacy expressed through the language of their texts; they sublimate language to convey meaning or accentuate the dichotomy between their characters' words and actions, thereby often creating holes resembling Addie Bundren's "lacks" between their characters' words and deeds.

Neither Faulkner nor Morrison can be read and understood without dedication on the part of the reader. Reader involvement is mandatory for comprehension of the scope and beauty in these authors' works. Many passages must often be re-read several times in order to ascertain the meaning beneath the narrative surface in language gaps. Morrison admits she leaves "holes and spaces" in her narrative which force the reader to come into the work. These "holes and spaces" can often then create narrative gaps or, to use Addie's word--"lacks"--those

moments when the character's word-to-deed dichotomy lingers in the shadows of the reader's imagination.

My challenge, and concentration for purposes of this discussion, is to locate certain narrative lacunae in selected works of Faulkner and Morrison. Once I have defined these areas, I wish to show how, drawing from this reader's imagination, the gaps can be bridged to explain the meaning Faulkner or Morrison attempts to show the reader without an overindulgence in language. Faulkner's Addie Bundren has been my inspiration and muse throughout my research. Her obsession with words, or the lack of them, has led me to read not only Faulkner's works more closely, but to turn my attention more intently to Morrison's style. I view Morrison's Eva Peace as Addie's sympathetic counterpart. Through Addie and Eva, Faulkner and Morrison give us an intimate insight into these characters' mental and physical sufferings which, in turn, has hopefully helped me reach an understanding of their needs. As my study of the two authors continued, I found many similarities between the writers' attitudes toward the overuse of language as an expressive form for describing their characters' emotions and/or actions. Through their protection and/or conservation of language, they demonstrate how words and deeds do not always fit snugly together.

In Sula, Morrison transposes Addie's desire for a word-to-deed to a deed-to-word effect and therein leaves a gap to be bridged by the reader. Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, along with her three children, Hannah, Plum and Pearl, are abandoned by the husband and father. Along with the children, he left Eva with:

"$1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel" (32). Morrison, like Faulkner, expresses through her language, her character's feelings of total abjection. Her leaving Eva with "no idea of what or how to feel," suggests the deepest gap/lacuna in her emotions at that moment. Hannah was five years old and the baby, Plum, still nursing. Eva had no one to care for the children should she find work in the already poverty-stricken community of Medallion. Morrison refrains from offering a lengthy narrative of the struggles Eva overcame to support herself and the children. A third-person narrator, however, tells us about the time, shortly after Boy Boy, the father, left his family that the baby, Plum, stopped having bowel movements.

Eva tried everything to alleviate the child's agony. She massaged his stomach and gave him warm water. A neighbor gave her castor oil for him and that didn't help: "He seemed in great pain and his shrieks were pitched high in outrage and suffering. At one point, maddened by his own crying, he gagged, choked and looked as though he was strangling to death" (34). Readers who are parents can understand the frustration and despair a mother feels when her child suffers in such a way. Eva resolves that she will put an end to his misery:

> **She wrapped him in blankets, ran her finger around the crevices and sides of the lard can and stumbled to the outhouse with him. Deep in its darkness and freezing stench she squatted down, turned the baby over on her knees, exposed his buttocks and shoved the last bit of food she had in the world (besides three beets) up his ass. Softening the insertion with the dab**

> of lard, she probed with her middle finger to loosen his bowels. Her fingernail snagged what felt like a pebble; she pulled it out and others followed. Plum stopped crying as the black hard stools ricocheted onto the frozen ground. And now that it was over, Eva squatted there wondering why she had come all the way out there to free his stools, and what was she doing down on her haunches with beloved baby boy warmed by her body in the almost total darkness, her shins and teeth freezing, her nostrils assailed. (34)

Morrison quietly incorporates so many emotions into this scatalogical passage--pride, despair, frustration, poverty, sacrifice and most importantly, a mother's love. The narrative holes are there and certainly not difficult for the reader to bridge. Eva takes the boy to the outhouse out of pride; this was not an act to be performed in an inappropriate place. The three-word parenthetical phrase, uttered in an almost-hushed voice, "(besides three beets)," substantiates the sacrifice Eva is willing to make for her boy. The sacrifice of the lard, the last bit of food she had besides the three beets, also reflects the ends to which love can carry a mother, frustrated and despairing at her child's suffering. The use of one of the last bits of food also demonstrates the baseness of the Peace family's poverty. Besides the deed-to-word actions, the only intimation of love put into language form in the passage is Eva's reference to Plum as "her beloved baby boy" (34).

Evidently Addie Bundren held her thoughts close to her heart until she poured them out in her interior monologue. We have only her proclamations that

Anse gave her love words, but his love deeds, if there were any, were lost to her. Hannah Peace, Sula's mother, years after her brother Plum's physical transformation, cannot grasp the converse effect of the word-to-deed dichotomy that so agonizes Addie Bundren. Hannah's desire for confirmation of her mother's love through words is similar to Addie's need for Anse to demonstrate his love through deeds rather than words. The concept that her mother's sacrifices during those hard years represent a form of love escapes Hannah. It's not enough, though, that the reader understands; Morrison's narrator evidently feels the need to bridge the deed-to-word gap. Perhaps it is because Hannah cannot acknowledge her mother's love through her sacrifices that she seeks reinforcement or even comfort in words. The same theory, only reversed, might also be true for Addie: She is searching so long and hard for the deed, she overlooks the sincerity in Anse's love words.

The hardships of survival lie beneath the surface of the text in one of Morrison's holes or spaces until years later when, sitting in her mother's room snapping beans, Hannah quietly and perhaps somewhat naively, asks Eva, "'Mamma, did you ever love us? . . . I was just wonderin'." Eva answers her daughter, "'No. I don't reckon I did. Not the way you thinkin'" (67). Hannah searches for what Addie had and, as with Addie and her "lacks" in Anse's and the other's deeds, she has no sense of how to fill the gaps between the deeds and the words.

Hannah's questioning and naive attitude trigger an angry response from

Eva. Following are excerpts from the dialogue between the mother and daughter:

> **'Mamma the only one ain't all right. Cause she didn't *love* us.'**
>
> **'Awww, Mamma."**
>
> **'Awww, Mamma? Awww, Mamma? You settin' here with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you? Them big old eyes in your head would a been two holes full of maggots if I hadn't.'**
>
> **'I didn't mean that, Mamma. I know you fed us and all. I was talkin' 'bout something else. Like. Like. Playin' with us. Did you ever, you know, play with us' (68)?**

As the dialogue continues Eva sarcastically explains what those awful days were like and how good Hannah has it now. But, Hannah still cannot grasp what Eva is trying to tell her. The lacuna between the mother and daughter not only broadens, but also deepens.

> **'Mamma, what you talkin' 'bout?'**
>
> **'I'm talking about 18 and 95 when I set in that house five days with you and Pearl and Plum and three beets, you snake-eyed ungrateful hussy. What would I look like leapin' 'round that little old room playin' with youngins with three beets to my name' (69)?**

Hannah persists in goading her mother: "'I know 'bout them beets, Mamma. You told us that a million times'" (69). Her attitude toward her mother reeks of insolence, boredom and disgust. She's heard the story "a million times" and still cannot fill the lacuna/hole Morrison opens for her. Like Faulkner with

Vardaman's identifying his dead mother with a fish, Morrison's words are few but incisive: "a million times." Eva's words are useless and wasted on Hannah. She again attempts to explain her form of love: "'. . . what you talkin' about did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer'" (69). Hannah's mind turns back to the beans and dinner. Does she comprehend the depth of her mother's love? Eva gave Hannah what Addie Bundren craved so desperately, the greatest possible deed of love–sacrifice. Hannah feels absolutely no sympathy or concern for her mother's struggles to fill in the emotional and historical gaps (and, for our purposes, the narrative spaces) precipitated by her question, "'Mamma, did you ever love us'" (67)? The lacuna in the relationship between mother and daughter is so deep and broad that words will never fill it. Perhaps Addie possesses some of Hannah's naiveté in that she cannot see beyond what she desires.

Faulkner and Morrison on Cultural and Social Symbolism in Their Writing

Faulkner's works have undeniably found their niche among the literary classics over the years. With the success of works such as Sula and Beloved, Morrison has also gained respect among literary critics for the social intensity and literary significance of her works. As her reputation grows, critics discuss her writing in relationship to Faulkner's and compare many different aspects of her works to his. She seems to acknowledge and accept the discussion. However, she maintains that literary criticism must be re-addressed, not only from the standpoint of African American Literature but also from the African American women writers' point of view. She told an interviewer in 1983:

> **We have no systematic mode of criticism that has yet evolved from us, but it will. I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* William Faulkner. I am not *like* in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is be *like* something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music, or in some other culture-gen that survives almost in isolation because the community manages to hold on to it. (CTM 152)**

Harold Bloom, a noted literary critic, has edited at least two collections of essays on Morrison's works–one in 1990 and the other in 1999, including his Introduction to each. In the 1990 collection, he states:

> As a leader of African American literary culture, Morrison is particularly intense in resisting critical characterizations that she believes misrepresent her own loyalties, her social and political fealties to the complex cause of her people. If one is a student of literary influence as such, and I am, then one's own allegiances as a critic are aesthetic, as I insist mine are. (Toni Morrison 1)

Bloom seems to maintain that a critic's analysis of a particular work, including Morrison's, should flow from the richness of the work, not the social context in which it is written. He further qualifies his belief: "We are free to choose our ideologies, but eros and art, however intertwined they are with cultural politics, cannot be reduced to politics alone" (3). The sociological significance of Morrison's themes throughout her works can lead a reader to a better understanding of racism in America. Evidently she has raised a cloud of controversy in the literary world with her thought-provoking belief that literature can raise cultural and social awareness for her readers. She acknowledges her belief, as I interpret her message, in Playing in the Dark, that literary criticism, especially, ignores social or cultural symbolism in the art of literature:

> Above all I am interested in how agendas in criticism have disguised themselves and, in so doing, impoverished the literature it studies. Criticism as a form of knowledge is capable of robbing literature not only of its own implicit and explicit ideology but of its ideas as well; it can dismiss the difficult, arduous work writers do to make an art that becomes part of and

> significant within a human landscape. It is important to see how inextricable Africanism is or ought to be from the deliberations of literary criticism and the wanton, elaborate strategies undertaken to erase its presence from view. (9)

In her introduction to a 1993 Modern Fiction Studies issue on Toni Morrison, Nancy J. Peterson maintains that, since the publication of Beloved, Morrison, ". . . has become the name around which debates of considerable significance to American literature, culture, and ideology have amassed–these include debates . . . about the possibility of creating literature that is both aesthetically beautiful and politically engaged" (465). Peterson adds that Modern Fiction Studies, a well-respected journal among scholars, believes in the canonization of Toni Morrison.

Faulkner also addressed the issue of a writer being able to create a notable work that is not only realistic but also socially and/or culturally symbolic. Although he appears firm in his belief that writers could not embody realism and symbolism in their writing, he was also known to adopt a naive attitude about his works. It is difficult to rely entirely upon what he says when we examine the complexities he creates within his prose: " . . .he's [the writer's] got to chose one of the two: either he is delivering a message or he's trying to create flesh-and-blood, living, suffering, anguishing human beings" (FU 47). Perhaps we should not dismiss what he says, but concentrate on the thought that, in order to create the anguish and suffering often seen in his characters, some sort of message must be

conveyed to the reader. Morrison has been able to accomplish this dualism in her literature which, on the surface, would discount Faulkner's philosophy. However, we must again consider that four decades have passed between Faulkner and Morrison and their contributions to literature. Faulkner did not live long enough to realize that that is exactly what he accomplished in his literary lifetime: Although it may not have been his goal when he began writing, he successfully created for his readers "flesh-and-blood, living, suffering, anguishing human beings" who deliver a message.

Considering the similarities in her and Faulkner's writing styles and philosophies, Morrison cannot escape literary critical theorists paralleling her works with Faulkner's. Essayists have compared Faulkner's Go Down, Moses to her Song of Solomon, his Absalom, Absalom! to her Jazz, and Light in August to Beloved. Bloom also says, "As a novelist, a rhetorical tale-teller, Toni Morrison was found by Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, two quite incompatible artists, except perhaps for the effect that James Joyce had upon both of them." He explains his theory thusly:

> Morrison's marvelous sense of female character and its fate in male contexts is an extraordinary modification of Woolfian sensibility, and yet the aura of Woolf always lingers on in Morrison's prose . . . . Faulkner's mode of narration is exquisitely modulated by Morrison, but the accent of Faulkner always can be heard in Morrison's narrators. (TM 3)

Bloom's statement that Morrison was "found" by Woolf and Faulkner is

somewhat perplexing; it seems a strange word to use in comparing writers. We can, however, consider his meaning from one or two postures: (1) Morrison was founded (as in foundry) in that she was molded from Woolf and Faulkner insofar as both writers unquestionably influence her writing; or, and a little less likely, (2) their influence on her helped to establish her basic writing style. He also might be subliminally referring to the fact the Morrison's M.A. thesis was written on suicide in Woolf and Faulkner, i.e. thereupon Morrison was found(ed).

Another aspect to be considered in a discussion of the two authors is how critical theorists view their works. Literary critics have labeled Faulkner a Modernist for his writing style. Through the decades following the publication of his first novel, Soldiers' Pay in 1926, Faulkner has epitomized the radical changes that occurred as Modernist theory came to the forefront in literary criticism. He experimented with words, often inventing new ones, thereby bringing chaos and uncertainty into his works. Morrison's works, however, are not only viewed as Modernist, but many critics categorize them as Postmodernist.

Faulkner and Morrison as Modernists

Malcolm Bradbury discusses the transition in literary tradition to Modernism since the turn of the twentieth century in his essay, "Phases of Modernism: The Novel and the 1920s." He tells us:

> We often take modernism to mean the internal stylization of the arts, the distortion of the familiar surface of observed reality, and the use of what has been called 'spatial form'–a disposition of artistic content according to the logic of metaphor, form or symbol, rather than to linear logic of story, psychological progress, or history. (84)

Neither Faulkner nor Morrison conveys through their writing the kind of linear logic that Bradbury associates with non-Modernist texts such as those of George Eliot or Henry James: their stories often have no basis in time. The story lines in Faulkner's Go Down, Moses, The Sound and the Fury, or Light in August, for example, deviate from any concept of chronological time. Morrison dates the chapters in Sula from 1919 to1940, omitting many years. The time frame may cover a span of twenty one years, but time within the chapters shuttles between the past and present. In Beloved, the actions of the past constantly haunt the present. Although the events in Light in August take place in only a week, Faulkner moves from character to character, placing and replacing them in a time frame, past and present, which dramatizes the events. By foregoing a straight-line time frame, both Faulker and Morrison not only deviate from the traditional, straightforward,

chronologically-ordered story line, they also create narrative lacunae or "holes" for the reader to come into in a search for truth. Volpe's discussion supports this theory. There is no questioning, according to Volpe, that Faulkner not only anticipates but expects reader participation. He says, "Faulkner places a considerable burden upon the reader... Faulkner's techniques may sometime exasperate, but they are effective in compelling the reader to join in the writer's search for truth" (32). This idea also applies to Morrison's works.

Volpe details the time frame, for example, in Go Down, Moses. The Ike McCaslin stories jump from 1855 to 1940, back to the 1880's, and finally back to 1940. "By fragmenting chronological time, juxtaposing stories of the past with stories of the present," he believes, "Faulkner reveals the effect of the past in the present.... Faulkner also dramatizes his recognition that though the human body must exist in chronological time, the mind does not function within the barriers imposed on the body" (30).

Faulkner's stream of consciousness narratives and/or interior monologues add to the uncertainty or complexity created with his juxtaposing past and present. In effect, the combination of narrative structures represents a revolt against the traditional forms of literary narratives prior to the advent of the Modernist period. Morrison, in The Bluest Eye, accomplishes the same effect through the use of two, possibly three, narrators and time fragmentation. As mentioned earlier, her narrative style differs from Faulkner's in that it is often more straightforward. She presents twists and turns in her works, however, which are reminiscent of

Faulkner's narrative techniques. As an example, she prefaces The Bluest Eye with excerpts from the traditionally white primer story of Dick and Jane. In doing so, she has created a space, for the reader to come into; in reality, her style here creates a crevasse we're not certain can be bridged.

Faulkner's and Morrison's art is not hampered but elevated because of their tossing away of the old beliefs. Bradbury's discussion on Modernism also contains the following statement which, I believe, encompasses the Faulkner and Morrison styles:

> **The artist is thus radical in a particular sense: he is concerned not so much with revolution in the world as with *revolution in the word.* It is not exterior crises that prompt him nor shape him; he is radical in his primary environment, that of art itself. (my emphasis 84)**

They revolt against an overabundance of words as a means to describe every nuance in their characters' words and deeds. Rather, they focus on word(s) or lack of them in an effort to gain reader participation which is important to both of them. They throw out of the literary window the need to interrupt the dramatic effect to remind the readers that they reading a book. Conversely, they construct lacunae in their narratives which command the reader's attention to the importance of the text, not the book.

Morrison speaks of "holes" or "spaces" in her novels which demand the reader's attention. She wants reader involvement and, in turn, wants him/her to bring his/her interpretation or conceptualization to her characters' motivations,

emotions, actions, and thoughts. The involvement she desires is subtle and challenging. When Cholly Breedlove tenderly covers the daughter he raped, Morrison doesn't expend energy in her language explaining that his action is a form of love, horrific as it is. She leaves the "hole"–the "lacuna"--for the reader to reach in to pull out the meaning.

Faulkner believed he didn't have to write so every "idiot" could understand his meaning. Aiken makes a strong point in contending that a reader must cooperate with Faulkner in order to extract meaning from his fiction. Addie Bundren holds the secret to Faulkner's opinion on superfluous language: [Words are] "just a shape to fill a lack." Addie maintains that we don't need words like love, pride or fear; that they are manifested in action. This takes us back to Addie's word-to-deed dichotomy and the lack of it, which creates the "lacunae" or "holes" in Faulkner's fiction. We, the readers, understand that Addie and Anse Bundren's relationship lacked deeds of love or tenderness without Faulkner having to explain in detail.

Bradbury further maintains:

> Modernism hence has oblique relations with the modern world; and its works make reports on it. . . . they [Modernist writers] deal rather in a contingent and fallen world stuck in a chaotic or circular history, a pointless time, and lacking order, structure, or myth save when these are created by the artifices of fiction or the transcendent power of form. (84)

Morrison, under no circumstances, should be looked upon as an imitator of

Faulkner's writing style. She has developed a style, separate and apart from his. However, a close reading of many of their works reveals underlying similarities in their novels make it difficult to doubt their philosophies differ greatly, especially in their creation of narrative holes or gaps. Their absolute concern with language and how to bring the words together is emphasized in the previously mentioned interviews. They share an authorial intimacy expressed through the language of their texts. They sublimate language to convey meaning or accentuate the dichotomy between their characters' words and actions, thereby creating the holes, gaps, or Addie's "lacks" between the word and deed.

Before Addie is given the opportunity to speak, we hear her son, Darl, in 19 chapters. Even Vardaman, her youngest child, who relates his mother's corpse to a fish, speaks in ten sections. We, the readers, do not reach an understanding of Addie's character until Anse, her husband, each of her five children, and her neighbors, Cora and Tull, have spoken. Only then, in the eighteenth section, does Faulkner allow us into Addie's mind. And, only after she has died and the family is in the second day of its journey to Jefferson with her corpse to honor Anse's promise to bury her with her family in Jefferson. Events leading up to that point are absurdly sad and humorous. Vardaman drills a hole into the coffin so his mother can breathe only to mutilate her body. The coffin is nearly swept away in the river, the mules drowned, and Cash has broken his leg. Volpe describes the time thusly: "The family has gone through the most hazardous day of the journey; the activity generated by the corpse is at its most furious, the suffering produced by

Anse's promise to Addie at its most intense" (131). He adds:

> It is at this point that Faulkner has Addie reveal the fact that the promise she exacts from Anse is meaningless to her. Her motive is revenge. She believes that Anse is incapable of responding to her real being, her reality, during life, and she vindictively forces him to cope with the reality of her dead body. (131)

Addie's pensiveness paints a grave picture of the unhappiness she believes she suffered as Anse's wife as well as in her personal relationships, and in motherhood.

The troubled spirit and search for identity represent common themes that run throughout Faulkner's and Morrison's works. The most caring and loving characters seem to have the greatest difficulty expressing themselves in language. Byron Bunch from Light in August, Sethe in Beloved, or Ike McCaslin in Go Down, Moses, speak, but their words are often lost in their deeds. The concept underlying Addie Bundren's metaphorical "lack" and Ike McCaslin's inability to have the heart to make the words "fit together," occurs in many Faulkner and Morrison characters. Their words are often reflected in, or replaced with deeds of loving, caring, sharing and, even passionate brutality. The reader, therefore, shares the responsibility with the characters for filling these "lacks" and making the words "fit together." Again, Morrison admits she leaves "holes" in her texts for the readers.

Bridging the Lacunae Formed by Tough Love: The Bluest Eye *and* Beloved

Morrison's works include two of the most dreadful passages in either her or Faulkner's novels: A father's rape of his young daughter in The Bluest Eye and a desperate mother's sawing the neck of her "almost crawling baby" in Beloved. As horrific as the deeds may seem to the reader, Morrison brings a poignancy to the actions that supercedes the horror through the quietness of her language. Words left unwritten somehow soften the violence. The reader must bring his/her imagination into the scenes, not to pass moral judgment, but to fill the holes or lacunae Morrison leaves to the reader.

"Dangerously free," her narrator describes Cholly Breedlove in The Bluest Eye: "Free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity" (125). "Dangerously free" to rape his young daughter? Rather than search for the words, a shape to fill the lack, Morrison unearths a deeper narrative hole in Cholly's raping of Pecola. Cholly provides the "lack" in the action of the rape, but the "shape" of the word " love" forms in his tenderly covering here afterward. The word "love" is outside the language spoken in the Breedlove house; it is not even used as a "shape to fill a lack." The security of a father's love through words or deeds, like that of an elephant in the house, cannot be missed--it has never been expressed for the girl, Pecola, to sense, feel, or touch. Morrison, however, leaves a hole in the narrative just large enough for a form of love, not good love but love nonetheless, to slip in.

Cholly's drunken vision of Pecola standing at the sink, puts him in a reflective, melancholy mood, and reminds him of Pauline and the tenderness they once shared. The passage preceding the rape is lengthy, but it brings into focus Cholly's emotions as he watches his young daughter washing dishes.

> Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort dissolve into revulsion, guilt, pity, then love . . . . Why did she look so whipped? She was a child–unburdened–why wasn't she happy? The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck–but tenderly. . . . What could he do for her–ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him–the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? . . . What could his heavy arms and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (127)

Pecola shifts her weight and stands on one foot, "scratching the back of her calf with her toe" in a "quiet and pitiful gesture." Memories of a young, lame Pauline intersperse with Pecola's movement in Cholly's drunken mind: "The tenderness welled up in him" and he reached for his daughter. When he's finished with the child, "hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to

cover her" (128-129). Why couldn't he have simply walked over to the child, put his arms around her and whispered, "I love you," rather than rape her? The reason is relatively simple: It is not Morrison's (nor Faulkner's) style to substitute language for subtlety. Morrison challenges the reader to ask the question, and in the challenge, demands that the reader reach down deeply into the narrative hole in the passage for the answer. A reader's immediate reaction to the scene in the Breedlove kitchen presumably is disgust. However, Morrison quietly engages the reader's participation by having Cholly show tenderness for the child and cover her.

The word "love" works in Cholly's mind as shown in the passage, but his brain cannot bring the phrase to his lips. Morrison told an interviewer that "he might love her in the worst of all possible ways because he can't do this and he can't do that" (CTM 41). However brutal the the deed appears to the reader, Pecola's rape compensates for his inability to express in language his love for his daughter. In contrast, Anse was incapable of compensating the use of a word with a deed for Addie. However, in death, the treacherous pilgrimage to Jefferson to bury Addie has been interpreted as an ultimate deed of love.

Morrison, winner of not only a Pulitzer prize for Beloved, but also the coveted Nobel Prize in Literature, focuses upon a different brutal act against a child in her novel. The perceived "awfulness" of the act in Beloved is not perpetrated by a father against his young daughter, but by a mother upon her baby daughter. The depth of the racial and sociological meaning in the work, as well as Morrison's

research in slave history, transcends the fiction insofar as the underlying story is based upon an old newspaper clipping Morrison uncovered in a research project. The article told of a young slave mother, Margaret Garner, who, in 1851, killed her young daughter rather than sentence her to an existence as the chattel of some slaveholder. The child, in effect, was sacrificed on the altar of freedom. Garner's tragedy and Morrison's fictionalizing her story also supports the theory that Morrison has an agenda to inform her readers of the cultural and sociological travesties of slavery. My primary focus is not in justifying her objective, but rests in explaining *how* Morrison creates "holes" or lacunas in her narratives to emphasize the helplessness/hopelessness she brings to her characters, especially with Sethe and Stamp Paid in attempting to use language to talk about the killing.

In a 1989 interview, Bill Moyers asked Morrison if, given certain circumstances, she could kill her sons. Morrison told him:

> **The reason the character Beloved enters the novel is because I couldn't answer it [the question]. . . . But the only person I felt had the right to ask [Sethe] that question was Beloved, the child she killed. She could ask Sethe, "What'd you do that for? Is this better? What do you know?" (CTM 272)**

Morrison gives Sethe the freedom to respond to her unasked questions in a short passage in which the only sound is that of Sethe's interior monologue:

> **Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to**

> explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. . . . I'll explain it to her, even though I don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. (Beloved 200)

Sethe's stream-of-consciousness interior monologue carries her back over the years to the horrors she suffered in slavery. She invokes the terror she felt in merely seeing schoolteacher. She desperately seeks to find the words to explain to Beloved how his presence threatened their existence. She and Eva Peace share this burden--they each sacrifice, Eva *for her child*, Sethe, *her child*, out of what Sethe calls "tough love." Sethe's actions, like Eva's, transpose Addie Bundren's word-to-deed dichotomy to a deed-to-word with a struggle for language to fill the gap. From all the words in the universe, they cannot bring the right ones together to bridge the tremendous gap that has formed between mother and child. But the alert reader, the one who is involved in the text, can reach into the deepest lacuna and *drag* meaning to the text's surface.

Morrison translates years of language into Sethe's interior monologue. The "holes" in the monologue generate from Sethe's desire and inability to form the words that will lead to Beloved's understanding and longed-for forgiveness. Beloved's interior monologue, immediately following Sethe's, is reminiscent of Faulkner's narrative style in many of his works–limited punctuation and capitalization in stream-of-consciousness interior monologues. These characteristics are extremely effective for getting into the characters' souls.

Morrison breaks Beloved's thoughts into eight paragraphs, with only one period and that at the end of the opening sentence, "I AM BELOVED and she is mine" (210). Only the words "I AM BELOVED" and "Sethe" are capitalized. The content is reminiscent of the opening paragraphs of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury–which are nearly incomprehensible. This incomprehensibility leads to an even deeper lacuna between the text and the reader than others discussed above; it's extremely difficult to give any meaning to Beloved's thoughts. Morrison doesn't help; she tells of her frustration regarding Beloved's voice at the end of the book:

> 'I couldn't get Beloved's voice,' says Morrison, 'I just couldn't get there. I wrote around it: She was there, but she couldn't say anything. . . . I could get Denver's and Sethe's voices, but I just couldn't get that girl to say where she had been'. (CTM 242)

She reinforces the reader's bewilderment as she attempts to bring Sethe and Beloved together by commingling thoughts from their separate interior monologues in the next section following their individual ones. They each speak and, as they come together, the bewilderment subsides somewhat and the gap narrows. However, Beloved remains a mysterious shadow.

Stamp Paid was in the yard at 124 when Sethe saw schoolteacher's hat and took her three children to the shed to free them from him. Beloved, of course, is the only child she killed before she was stopped. Years later he struggles to make Paul D understand the Sethe who flew at the sight of her former master, how she

"snatched up her children like a hawk on the wing, . . . How she collected them every which way" and carried then shoved them into the woodshed (Beloved 157). He shows him, instead, the ancient, yellowed clipping bearing Sethe's face. Paul D refuses to believe that's the girl he knew years ago across the Ohio River. "So Stamp Paid didn't say it all. Instead he took a breath and leaned towards the mouth [in the clipping] that was not hers and slowly read the words Paul D couldn't" (158). Morrison cannot and will not sacrifice words to Stamp Paid. Instead she sublimates language into a yellowed clipping bearing a runaway slave girl's picture. (The clipping probably represents the one about Margaret Garner from over one hundred years ago. Interestingly, that clipping inspired Morrison to unleash the remarkable stream of words she gives us in Beloved. She has, in effect, bridged a "hole" in time by fictionalizing Margaret Garner's story.)

Stamp Paid thinks of the house at 124, locked against the outside, and the three strange women within: "Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to [him] were the thoughts of the women of 124, *unspeakable thoughts, unspoken*" (199) (My emphasis added). The *unspeakable thoughts, unspoken* of the action in the past must remain unspoken for, if they are put into words, the horror comes to life once more. The foregoing statement is contradictory when we look at the last few pages of Beloved in which Morrison's narrator tells us, "It was not a story to pass on. . . . It was not a story to pass on. . . . This is not a story to pass on" (275). The term, "pass on," can be interpreted in different ways: It is not a story to leave to those who come after or pass on to the

next generation or pass judgment on. Or, in the alternative, it is not a story to overlook; it needs to be passed down from generation to generation so the tragedy will not be forgotten. Possibly Morrison searches for language, words that construct and deconstruct simultaneously and this is how we bridge the chasm.

James Phelan, in "Toward a Rhetorical Reader-Response: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Ending of Beloved," also supports a dual-meaning in "It was(This is) not a story to pass on." The phrase, he believes, is not only defined "in the sense of 'to pass by'–but it was something else, *a reality to be confronted*" (720). His thoughts do not bridge any lacunae, gaps, holes, or whatever Beloved may hold for the reader because he shares the readers' bewilderment. However, he offers an excellent statement on the duality of meaning in passing the story on:

> By having the narrator shift from "It was" to "This is" not a story to pass on, Morrison addresses the authorial audience most directly. Furthermore, the sentence is loaded with almost as many meanings as Beloved, and it has its force precisely because Beloved has been so loaded with meanings. This is not just a story to tell for amusement; this is not a story to pass by; this is not a story to tell lightly because once you tell it things will never be the same. But this is also not a story you will ever fully comprehend. (722)

The narratorial lacunae, whether they are metaphorical, historical, cultural, or sociological Morrison brings into Beloved and her characters cannot simply or easily be bridged. Perhaps Stamp Paid attempts to bridge the lacuna in his talk

with Paul D: "She ain't crazy. She love those children. She was trying to outhurt the hurter" (234).

Ike McCaslin: Making the Words Fit Together

Sethe was willing to use the strongest, most wretched form of tough love when she grabbed her young children and ran to the shed at the sight of Schoolteacher's hat in the yard. In Faulkner's Go Down, Moses, the geography shifts south to Mississippi where slaves are also an integral part of the early life on the McCaslin plantation. The novel is composed of seven short stories told in fragmented time. In disrupting linear time, Faulkner effectively juxtaposes the past with the present. The first three stories, "Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," and "Pantaloon in Black," sketch out racial history and relationships in the ante-bellum South and, more importantly, in the McCaslin family tree. Faulkner shows how the racial barrier collapses as he weaves the stories in and out of chronological order; he takes the Negro from the early days of total abjection in slavery to a modern-day, near acceptance, whether the Negro be born of the white man or the white man of the Negro. The irony of his historical narrative, while it may parallel Southern bias and beliefs, remains in the racially-diverse McCaslin family. Family history threatens Ike McCaslin's sense of what is right or fair. He carries the misdeeds of almost one hundred years in his heart which opens a deep lacuna for his guilt. Ike spends most of his life attempting to climb out of the metaphorical hole his grandfather shoved him into at birth. Volpe argues that the " . . . conflict between an inherited racial code and the actuality of human relations is symbolic of

the complexities and tensions that tear modern man apart. It is this pattern of tension and guilt that is Isaac McCaslin's heritage" (RGWF 238). Ike alone cannot bridge the bottomless chasm that is racial history in the South; he hopes he can, however, atone for the injustices he feels have been born of the McCaslin family.

A brief outline of the McCaslin family history will ease the confusion in discussing Go Down, Moses. Volpe offers an excellent Chronology of Important Dates and a genealogy chart for reference in sorting out the McCaslin family tree, Negro and white. Ike's grandfather, Carothers McCaslin bought a wilderness land from then Indian Chief Ikkemotubbe, which the Chief had, in turn, acquired through treachery. McCaslin fathers twin sons, Uncle Buck, Ike's father, Uncle Buddy, and one daughter with his wife; with his Negro mistress, he sires a daughter, Tomasina, and with Tomasina, he sires Tomey's Turl.

The elder McCaslin's Will leaves ten acres to the son of his Negro slaves (whose wife is coincidentally Tomasina, his Negro mistress); the legacy is refused. The young man settles for $200 and his freedom but insists he work off the money before he takes his freedom. McCaslin also leaves $1,000 to Terrel (Tomey's Turl) Beauchamp, his son and grandson by his Negro mistress, which is also refused. Buck and Uncle Buddy increase the inheritance to $3,000 to be set aside for each of Tomey Turl's surviving children.

"Past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half the county and father to no one," Ike is the last

white, direct, male descendant of Old Carothers McCaslin (GDM 3). Tomey Turl's son, Lucas Beauchamp, Ike's cousin, is the last Negro, direct, male offspring. Volpe's dateline shows that on March 17, 1895, Lucas Beauchamp asked Ike for his and his brother James' legacy. From Ike's aunt, he receives acreage and a house to be his so long as he lives on the plantation.

In Ike, Faulkner created a quiet, pensive character, guilt-ridden by lineage, who loves the land and wilderness for itself, not for the benefits of ownership. He owns no property "and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's" (348). Although he shares no responsibility in his grandfather's mastering land and slaves or fathering his own grandchild, Ike wears the guilt like sackcloth. The old deeds, along with man's claiming the wilderness, weigh heavily on his soul. Because Ike McCaslin is a simple, understandable character, Faulkner uses simple, understandable language to describe him:

> –a widower these twenty years, who in all his life had owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time, and this was the narrow iron cot and stained Jean mattress which he used for camping in the woods for deer and bear or for fishing or simply because he loved those woods; who owned no property and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were. (3)

At the age of ten, Ike McCaslin was first allowed to go into the wilderness on

a family hunting trip. Sam Fathers, a descendant of old Chief Ikkemotubbe, became Ike's mentor and spiritual leader from the first day in his years of going into the wilderness. He shot his first buck at 12 and Sam baptized him in the deer's blood--the blood of the wilderness–"and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man" (178). From that moment, the land and wilderness transcended all for Ike spiritually:

> Sam Fathers had marked him indeed, not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people. He stopped breathing then; there was only his heart, his blood, and in the following silence the wilderness ceased to breathe also, leaning, stooping overhead with its breath held, tremendous and impartial and waiting. (182)

Volpe tells us that although Ike finds the natural man within him, ". . . he is never able to fuse into one harmonious being the social and the natural aspects of his personality. . . . When Ike tries to live in society by the code he learns in the woods, his attempt founders on the very complexity it should have simplified" (243-244). Volpe also maintains that there is an unbridgeable gap between the social and natural worlds, between the social man and what he calls "the buried natural man" (244). We have, in Ike McCaslin, the "natural buried" man caught in the deep chasm, the lacuna, between the social and natural worlds and he can't make them fit together. His spiritual world emanates from the wilderness within him; that's why Faulkner emphasizes Ike's desire to own nothing more than he can wear or

carry in his pocket at one time.

As he does with Joe Christmas, Faulkner brings Ike's emotions and beliefs to the surface of the text through an omniscient narrator. Through his omniscience, the narrator has the freedom to move in and out of Ike's consciousness as well as bring him into the external world of the wilderness. The narrator does not stray far from the author with Ike's character. In "The Bear," Faulkner presents us with a stream-of-consciousness narration, lengthy, but relative to understanding Ike. The passage is broken into two long paragraphs with little punctuation. I am setting down pertinent portions of the passage which can help us to understand, but not necessarily bridge, any lacunae we find in Ike's character:

> then he was twenty-one. He could say it, himself and his cousin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land which was to have been his heritage, the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man's money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it and in their sweat scratched the surface . . . in order to grow something out of it which had not been there before and which could be translated back into the money he who believed he had bought it had to pay to get it and

hold it and a reasonable profit too (254);

The passages I quote from Go Down, Moses are long but they emphasize the power of the deceptive simplicity in the narrator's language. Within these passages, we are able to reach an understanding of the depth of Ike McCaslin's shame at his heritage. The simple phrase, "human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death," suggests that possibly slavery on the McCasland plantation may not have been very different from that of Sethe's Sweet Home. Although he said he did not believe he (or any writer) could concern themselves with symbolism while creating a notable work, Faulkner belies that statement in Go Down, Moses. From the excerpted quote above, we see that Faulkner, in his generation, was as aware of the power of slavery as Morrison is today.

Ike's inner conflict, the lacuna in his spirit, has dual implications: One, his grandfather "tamed and ordered" the wilderness in order to make a profit and, second, he accomplished his goal through slave labor. The narrator continues:

> and for which reason old Carothers McCaslin . . . could raise his children, his descendants and heirs, to believe the land was his to hold and bequeath since the strong and ruthless man has a cynical foreknowledge of his own vanity and pride and strength and a contempt for all his get . . . knew in his turn that not even a fragment of it had been his to relinquish or sell
>
> not against the wilderness but against the land, not in pursuit and

> **lust but in relinquishment, and in the commissary as it should have been . . . the square, galleried, wooden building squatting like a portent above the fields whose laborers it still held in thrall '65 or no and placarded over with advertisements for . . . potions manufactured and sold by white men to bleach the pigment and straighten the hair of negroes that they might resemble the very race which for two hundred years had held them in bondage and from which for another hundred years not even a bloody civil war would have set them completely free**
>
> **. . . the desk and shelf above it on which rested ledgers in which McCaslin recorded the slow outward trickle of food . . . and the older ledgers clumsy and archaic in size and shape, on the yellowed pages of which were recorded in the faded hand of his father Theophilus and his uncle Amodeus during the two decades before the Civil War, the manumission in title at least of Carother McCaslin's slaves. (255-256)**

Toward the end of the text, the then old man, Ike McCaslin, becomes as pensive as Addie Bundren on what might be his last trip to the wilderness, and speaks in terms parallel to hers. The men's conversation turns to killing does and fawns. Roth Edmonds had made the comment earlier in the day that women and children were two things the world would never lack. Ike said, "But that aint all of it. . . . That's just the mind's reason a man has to give himself because the heart don't always have time to bother with thinking up the words that fit together"

(348). To Ike, man's reasoning is his way of making excuses to bridge those gaps in life he cannot understand.

Ike cannot call upon the appropriate language which will make retribution for the destroyed freedom of the Negro side of his family or the equally destroyed wilderness, although his heart aches for each. He can relinquish, or repudiate, the land through legal means, but he cannot assuage his conscience or define his spiritual intimacy with the wilderness in words. The appropriate words, as with Addie, "don't fit together." Ike and Sethe attempt to close the gap between the past and the present; she through preventing her past from coming alive for her children, and he through an inadequate hope of retribution. Faulkner and Morrison again and again, as seen in their narratives surrounding Ike and Sethe, delve deeply into the hopeless and helpless chasms in their characters' souls, leaving us, as readers, the challenge of filling those gaps.

The Wilderness Called Milkman Dead

The wilderness also serves as a backdrop for a spiritual awakening for Milkman Dead in the final chapters of Morrison's Song of Solomon. The complexities which make up Ike McCaslin's character counter Milkman's. Ike may be the most substantial character in Faulkner's fiction. The lacunae or gaps in his character result from an inherent spirituality and wisdom in conflict with his melancholic understanding of the metaphorical wilderness in his soul for which he cannot find atonement. Ike McCaslin realizes his heritage; Milkman, whose early years are spent wandering in a metaphoric wilderness, must grow into his racial through both wisdom and understanding.

Milkman Dead evinces a superficiality in character not often seen in Faulkner or Morrison protagonists. This superficiality opens up a broad lacuna in his character that challenges the reader to delve deeply into the depth of his conflict. Morrison describes Milkman as "ignorant." "He wanted to be comfortable, and he didn't want to go anywhere, except to chase something that was elusive, until he found out that there was something valuable to chase." (CTM 145). It is only after Milkman sets out on a quest for some supposedly long, lost gold that the superficiality begins to recede into the shadows of wisdom and understanding for the young man–and the reader.

Milkman's story begins while he is still a baby in his mother's womb. His parents relationship can only be described as extraordinarily hostile; his father

hates his weakling mother for her continued reverence for her dead father. When he discovers her pregnancy, he demands she abort the child. It

> became the nausea caused by the half ounce of castor oil Macon made her drink, then a hot pot recently emptied of scalding water on which she sat, then a soapy enema, a knitting needle (she only inserted the tip, squatting in the bathroom, crying, afraid of the man who paced outside the door), and finally, when he punched her stomach . . . he looked at her stomach and punched it. (131)

She escapes to Macon Dead's sister, Pilate, who helps her save the baby. Milkman was born the day his mother saw an insurance agent kill himself by attempting to fly from the church's cupola. He was the first Negro to be born in the white hospital–his sisters had been delivered by his mother's father.

The narrator doesn't tell us how old the boy, christened Macon Dead, was when he would enter the small study to appease his mother by allowing her to nurse him: "He was too young to be dazzled by her nipples, but he was old enough to be bored by the flat taste of mother's milk . . . " (13). The daily routine as well as his name were both changed when Freddie, one of his father's tenants, peered in the study window and witnessed the scene. From that day on, young Macon Dead became Milkman Dead.

The elder Macon Dead, a slum lord, fills his son's head with white, middle-class values–an obsession for money, a big car, good clothes, a place at the

beach–those material possessions which create a facade of superiority in the black community. The narrator tells us that Milkman feared and respected his father. But, because of an imagined deformity caused by one leg being shorter than the other, he could not emulate him. If Milkman imagined his father as an ideal, those feelings crumbled as his father did when Milkman struck him for hitting his mother with his fist. At that moment, he reaches a realization about his father. He felt:

> Sorrow in discovering that the pyramid was not a five-thousand-year wonder of the civilized world, mysteriously and permanently constructed by generation after generation of hardy men who had died in order to perfect it, but that it had been made in the back room of Sears, by a clever window dresser, of papier-mâché, guaranteed to last for a mere lifetime. (68)

The chivalrous act also made him examine his feelings for his mother. He explains the act and his reasoning behind it:

> He was a man who saw another man hit a helpless person. . . . He would not pretend that it was love for his mother. She was too insubstantial, too shadowy for love. But it was her vaporishness that made her more needful of defense. . . . She seemed to know a lot but understand very little. It was an interesting train of thought, and new for him. Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own. (75)

Milkman lacks a foundation, a sense of self. His father, who wanted him

aborted, has added the young man to his possessions, one more thing he can say belongs to him and he can control. His father tells him: "Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (55). His mother smothers him; his sisters lack substance in his life. There's a shapelessness, a gap, in his character and Morrison's narrator stresses this often. Searching a mirror for answers, Milkman sees a face that, ". . . lacked coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self" (69). And, "He wondered if there was anyone in the world who liked him. Liked him for himself alone" (79). When Milkman reaches what he believes is his emotional bottom, he searches for his friend, Guitar. "He needed to find the one person left whose clarity never failed him" (79).

Guitar's motivations, however, are not clear to Milkman. The narrator opens the gap, the lacuna in Milkman's character, and it begins to take a shadowy shape:

> Maybe Guitar was right–partly. His life was pointless, aimless, and it was true that he didn't concern himself an awful lot about other people. There was nothing he wanted bad enough to risk anything for, inconvenience himself for. . . .
>
> He couldn't get interested in money. No one had ever denied him any, so it had no exotic attraction. . . . He was bored. Everybody bored him. The city was boring. The racial problems that consumed Guitar were the

> most boring of all. He wondered what they would do if they didn't have black and white problems to talk about. Who would they be if they couldn't describe the insults, violence, and oppression that their lives (and the television news) were made up of? If they didn't have Kennedy or Elijah to quarrel about. They excused themselves for everything. Every job of work undone, every bill unpaid, every illness, every death was The Man's fault. And Guitar was becoming just like them–except he made no excuses for himself–just agreed, it seemed to Milkman with every grievance he heard. (108-109)

Milkman's been surrounded by words all his life: His father's which sounded so white, and Guitar's, whose words are so black he believes killing innocent whites atones for blacks killing innocent whites. Although he has been reared with his father's language of money and ownership and understands its meaning, he cannot grasp the significance of Guitar's. Guitar tries to explain to Milkman about his organization, The Seven Days, a secret society, which premises its belief on the Biblical eye for an eye: A Negro is killed by a white, a member of The Seven Days randomly kills a white person in retribution for the initial murder. Milkman asks Guitar, "Am I going to live any longer because you all read the newspaper and then ambush some poor old white man?" Guitar responds: "It's not about you living longer. It's about how you live and why. It's about whether your children can make other children. It's about trying to make a world where

one day white people will think before they lynch" (160). The dialogue ends with Guitar telling Milkman he is the Sunday Man. Milkman tells his friend, "'I'm scared for you, man.'" "'That's funny. I'm scared for you too'" (161).

Milkman has, in many ways, lived the American dream even within the dysfunctional Dead household. He has had no reason to want to understand the ugliness and violence in racism. Guitar possesses the language to describe the deeds involved in the loathsomeness of racial injustice in America, but cannot find the words to raise Milkman's social awareness. Guitar understands that the lacuna, the fathomless chasm between knowing and believing in Milkman's mind and heart, cannot be crossed in a rope knotted in words.

Morrison told an interviewer that what she wanted in Milkman "was a character who had everything to learn, who would start from zero, and had no reason to learn anything, because he's comfortable, he doesn't need money, he's just flabby and pampered. . . . a sort of an average person who has no impetus to learn anything" (CTM 76). Through Milkman, she presents the reader with a character who lacks individual identity and who exists aimlessly rather than lives with purpose. Two characters act as catalysts in attempting to bridge the gap within Milkman between merely existing according to his father's standards, and living some sort of meaningful life by gaining a sense of his self: His father's sister, Pilate, who was responsible for him being given life and, of course, Guitar. Pilate sings him songs of the magic and folklore founded in his racial heritage. Her

beliefs, contradictory to his father's, are strange to Milkman. She attempts to draw him away from pseudo-whiteness of Macon Dead's material world and instill within him the sense of freedom he can find in acknowledging, understanding, and accepting his spiritual black heritage. Guitar, on the other hand, subverts Pilate's folklore with the harshness of reality. Within these two characters, Morrison presents the juxtaposition of the two sides of contemporary American blackness. On one side is the poignant beauty of acceptance and conciliation with his blackness and, on the other is Guitar's horrific reality of racism in America.

Guitar's sense of self, especially as it pertains to his race, in Part I of Song of Solomon baffles and confuses Milkman. He still exists in the lacuna of indecision and indirection. Then one day his father tells him a story about a dead man and gold in a cave. He convinces Milkman Pilate took the gold from the cave. Milkman, in turn, shares the story with Guitar. They plot to steal the gold from Pilate only to learn she doesn't have it. It is only after he sets out alone on a quest for the long lost gold in the true nature of his father that he reaches an understanding of what Guitar has struggled to show him.

His quest takes him from the city into a remote area in Virginia where his car breaks down in the poor, rural community of Shalimar. His introduction into Shalimar signals the beginning of his attempt to bridge the gap between knowing and understanding. He makes small talk with a group of Negro men gathered at the general store: "Nice around here. Peaceful. Pretty women too" (SOS 265). The

friendly attitude of the men changed. "Milkman sensed he had struck a wrong note. About the women, he guessed. What kind of place was this where a man couldn't even ask for a woman?" (265). Milkman asks Mr. Solomon, the proprietor, if one of men might get him a new belt for his car. He then makes the statement that shows how wide the gap is between the color of his skin and his racial heritage: "If they can't find one, let me know right away. I may have to buy another car to get home" (266). Milkman exudes a white arrogance that can't and won't be forgiven in a black man. The passage following Milkman's statement eloquently defines what he cannot comprehend:

> They looked with hatred at the city Negro who could buy a car as if it were a bottle of whiskey because the one he had was broken. And what's more, who had said so in front of them. He hadn't bothered to say his name, nor ask theirs, had called them 'them,' . . . His manner, his clothes were reminders that they had no crops of their own and no land to speak of either. . . . They had seen him watching their women and rubbing his fly as he stood on the steps. They had also seen him lock his car as soon as he got out of it in a place where there couldn't be more than two keys twenty-five miles around. He hadn't found them fit enough or good enough to want to know their names, and believed himself too good to tell them his. They looked at his skin and saw it was as black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up in the trucks when they

needed anonymous, faceless laborers. (266)

Milkman is stamped white by the men and the younger ones taunt him into a fight, his only weapon a broken beer bottle. He escapes with a cut but it's the challenge from the older men he knows will be different from the younger ones' name calling. They invite him to go hunting with them that evening. He cannot fathom these men as a part of his heritage or that the words Negro or Black Man extend beyond the city, his neighborhood or his problems. Through Pilate and his travels, he had learned his ancestors had been a part of Shalimar; but he finds it to be a world beyond understanding: "He thought this place, this Shalimar was going to be home. His original home. His people came from here, his grandfather and his grandmother. . . . In his own home town, his name spelled dread and grudging respect. But here, in his 'home' he was unknown, unloved, and damn near killed. These were some of the meanest unhung niggers in the world" (270).

Milkman has traveled from the city to the remote region but doesn't comprehend he must also make a cultural transition. These men neither dread him nor even owe him any drudging respect. His father taught him only of ownership, possessions and money, all of which were useless in the backwoods community of Shalimar. He even debases the men by thinking of them as "niggers," not Negroes or black men. The lacuna in Milkman's character reaches its broadest and deepest in these passages. Words and deeds could have eased his way with the men; he could have offered a simple introduction and extended his hand in friendship.

Instead, he displayed a white man's arrogance. Along with many other things, Milkman cannot comprehend the link between the word and the deed.

But in the woods, in the wilderness that evening with these men, his quest for gold disappears into the shadows, forgotten, replaced by a search for self. He reaches the pinnacle of understanding that Guitar himself may not have fully understood and, if he had, would not have been able to make him feel through only language.

> Under the moon, on the ground, alone, with not even the sound of baying dogs to remind him that he was with other people, his self–the cocoon that was his 'personality'–gave way. He could barely see his own hand, and couldn't see his feet. He was only his breath, coming slower now, and his thoughts. The rest of him had disappeared. There was nothing here to help him–not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit or his shoes. . . . His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was his what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance. Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch–and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all the things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend upon. (277)

It's interesting and optimistic that the one word Morrison doesn't use in this passage to describe Milkman's feelings is the word "fear." His physical body has disappeared into the darkness and Milkman is left only with his thoughts.

Understanding begins to fill the great chasm in his spirit. The whiteness in his father's language also vanishes, along with the material things he brought with him. As the narrator continues, language, not specifically of words, but of sounds and signals, transcends the darkness for Milkman:

> And the dogs spoke to the men: . . . And the men agreed or told them to change direction or come back. . . . It was all language. An extension of the click people made in their cheeks back home when they wanted a dog to follow them. No, it was not language; it was what there was before language. Before things were written down. Language in the time when men and animals did talk to one another . . . and each understood the other; . . . And if they [the men] could talk to animals, and the animals could talk to them, what didn't they know about human beings? Or the earth itself, for that matter. [Calvin] whispered to the trees, whispered to the ground, touched them, as a blind man caresses a page of Braille, pulling meaning through his fingers.
>
> He felt a sudden rush of affection for them all, and out there under the sweet gum tree, within the sound of men tracking a bobcat, he thought he understood Guitar now. Really understood him. (278)

Leaving the woods with the men, "he found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil,

and were comfortable there–on the earth and on the place were he walked. And he did not limp" (281).

Morrison's Milkman would also now understand what Faulkner's Ike McCaslin meant when he said the heart doesn't have time to think about words fitting together. In "Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page," Timothy B. Powell maintains that "These toothless, poverty-stricken men who look sideways at him with scorn and attempt to slit his throat," strip him of his whiteness and "instill in him the knowledge necessary to interpret the black text" (758). The black text, according to Powell, are the songs and stories Pilate shared with Milkman. Even though he speaks in terms of text and language, Powell's thoughts can be extended to include the knowledge, therefore, to interpret his truly black self, not through knotted words but through an unspoken language.

In discussing Ike McCaslin's inner conflict between society and the wilderness, Volpe says that "Anyone who is born and brought up within society is necessarily divided. Deep within him is the natural man; superimposed is the social man. Between society and the woods, between social man and the buried natural man, there is an unbridgeable gap" (243). Volpe's comments can also pertain to Morrison's Milkman Dead. The division in Ike's spirit began early in life. However, Milkman, prior to going into the woods, has no conscious sense of any "unbridgeable gap" between the social and natural man. Subconsciously, and similar to Faulkner's style, Morrison's narrator doesn't comment on it, his first

inkling of any gap can be construed to be when he enters the general store and comes face to face with its inhabitants. When he later finds himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth like he belongs to it, he truly bridges the gap between society and the wilderness. He has learned what Ike McCaslin would not have been able to find the words in his heart to tell him.

Joe Christmas: A Lacuna Called Abstractness

Contemplation of Milkman Dead's search for self presents an excellent segue into a reflection of Faulkner's Joe Christmas. Alfred Kazin, in an essay entitled "The Stillness of Light in August," describes him as "the most solitary character in American fiction, the most extreme phase conceivable of American loneliness. He is never seen full face, but always as a silhouette, a dark shadow haunting others, a shadow upon the road he constantly runs . . ." (253). He also remarks that he is "an abstraction seeking to become a human being. In the race-mad South, many a Negro–and Mexican, and Jew–is turned into an abstraction. But this man is *born* an abstraction and is seeking to become a person" (252). Born of a white mother, who died at his birth, and (possibly) a Mexican father, Joe's self-righteous, racist grandfather brands him "nigger" at birth, kills the child's father, and steals the baby away, unnamed, to an orphanage for white children on Christmas Eve. The name he carried as he ran through the years was not the family name–not his name, Hines–but the name given him at the orphanage. His grandfather, Doc Hines, conveniently on hand when the baby is discovered, tells the puzzled doctor and attendants the baby's name is Joseph. The self-righteous old man has ironically named the child after the Biblical Joseph whose brothers sold him into slavery to the Egyptians. When the staff asked how he knew the child's name, he said, "The Lord says so" (286). So he is named Joe Christmas. His future, however, will not

rest with a just and generous Pharaoh as found in the Bible story. Faulkner said that "Joe's tragedy was that he didn't know what he was and would never know, and that to me is the most tragic condition that an individual can have–to not know who he was" (FU 118).

Milkman's need manifests itself in his desire to *understand* himself and his place within the world of the black man. Joe's need, however, extends beyond understanding himself; he first must *know* what or who he is, beyond an abstraction. He must accept an identity, not an insidious label, before he can reach that understanding and assimilate himself into a society, black or white. Faulkner has, through Joe Christmas' character, presented his readers with perhaps one of the most complex and bewildering lacunae in American fiction. The gap or hole in the narrative is not represented, as with Addie Bundren, Eva Peace, or Cholly Breedlove, by a hopeless breach between the word and deed or, conversely, a deed-to-word dichotomy. The gap in which Joe Christmas exists is within himself and widens and deepens into an abyss of the unknowable and unattainable so far below the narrative surface that neither he nor the reader can climb out into a world of realization. Simply, the lacuna is within the abstraction of the character of Joe Christmas.

Donald M. Kartiganer offers an interesting depiction of Joe Christmas' nonreality:

> Joe Christmas well knows, as does Faulkner, that there is no

> language, no action, no available myth or version of reality, that will allow him to live the entirety of his contradictory being. His life is spent in the quest for such a possibility, but not in the north or south of his universe does there exist a name for his wholeness. ("Toward a Supreme Fiction" 45)

It's difficult to write about Joe Christmas, since addressing him by either his first or last name as with other fictional characters, may complicate rather than clarify his role. Referring to him as "Joe" suggests familiarity, a trait he was not accustomed to during his life; calling him "Christmas" connotes an attempt at broadening the gap between his character and the reader. It's interesting that Faulkner refers to him throughout the novel as "Christmas," but in the interview he, with familiarity, calls him "Joe." By distancing the reader from his character through the unknowing and unattainable, Faulkner effectively embodies and emphasizes his character's abstractness.

Joe Christmas moves throughout the work shifting between white and black worlds, his identity undefined, searching for a world that will claim him. His existence wavers between a black and white dichotomy of abstractness with no definition for him. He lived in the north for a time with a black woman and worked with blacks. Evidently, he was accepted on some level or he wouldn't have remained for a period of time. He was, however, confused by the color of his skin: "Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he

fought the Negro who called him white" (LIA 167). The words "black" and/or "white" attach to his consciousness only with relation to his current place in time until he murders Joanna Burden. It is only then, at that moment, that forces come together to give him an identity: The "nigger" who killed a white woman.

Joe Christmas wanders aimlessly in the hours preceding and following Joanna's murder. His early rambling takes him from the downtown area into Freedman Town, the Negro section of the community. At this point, Faulkner gives us probably the broadest and, darkest, description of him within the novel:

> Nothing can look quite as lonely as a big man going along an empty street. Yet though he was not large, not tall, he contrived somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadow-brooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost. (84)

Faulkner not only broadens but also deepens the lacuna born in the mystery of Joe's identity by describing only his size and then, further placing him in obscurity through the darkness of his language. How isolated is a man who looks like a phantom spirit lost from his world and "lonelier than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert"? Faulkner's description reinforces Kazin's belief that Joe Christmas is the most solitary character in American fiction.

Wandering, isolated, on the "shadow-brooded street" in Freedman Town, Joe's senses take possession of his spirit. He was:

> . . . surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his. . . .
>
> He was standing still now, breathing quite hard, glaring this way and that. About him the cabins were shaped blackly out of blackness by the faint, sultry glow of kerosene lamps. On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecundmellow voices of negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female. (84)

Volpe says that "Female (the symbol of man's fall from grace), and Negro are linked for Joe, with damnation" (Guide 168). He runs from Freedman Town and the "fecundmellow voices" and stands on the verge of the white section: "He stopped here, panting, glaring, his heart thudding as if it could not or would not yet believe that the air now was the cold hard air of white people. Then he became cool. The negro smell, the negro voices were behind and below him now" (84-85). Joe's wandering takes him then through the white neighborhood. He could:

> . . . walk quiet here. Now and then he could see them; heads in silhouette, a white blurred garmented shape; on a lighted veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the woman glaring smooth and white about the trivial cards. (85)

Faulkner's language, in taking the reader along with Joe Christmas on his physical and emotional journey between the white and black neighborhoods, illustrates how he utilizes words to show the helplessness or hopelessness of his character. The tone of his language changes from Freedman Town to the white neighborhood. It evokes the racial gap between the two worlds, both in reality and in his character. In Freedman Town, he marries words to form other words such as "cabinshapes," "kerosenelit," and, importantly, "fecundmellow." These words insinuate that a quiet, yet poignant mood envelopes Joe; especially since the Freedman Town passage closes with the statement that Joe's heart was thudding as though ". . . it could not or would not yet believe that the air now was the cold hard air of white people" (84). Through the strong contrast in language, Faulkner almost lulls the reader into a false sense that Joe may have reached a spiritual epiphany in that he feels a unity with the Negroes.

However, Faulkner complicates the passages even more so; he portrays Joe as running through Freedman Town--he has, in fact, to stop to catch his breath before entering the "cold hard air of white people" (84). Contrarily, he can walk "quiet" in the white section. Faulkner continues to broaden the lacuna--deepen the shadowy gap in the black/white dichotomy called Joe Christmas. He compounds our consternation when he lets us into Joe's thoughts briefly after he sees the white people playing cards on their porch,: "'That's all I wanted,'" he thought. 'That don't seem like a whole lot to ask'" (85). Faulkner challenges us to ask what it is

that Joe wants? But Joe had answered a significant part of the question earlier that afternoon. Sitting against a tree, reading, a stillness overtook him:

> **He would not move, apparently arrested and held immobile by a single word which had perhaps not yet impacted, his whole being suspended by the single trivial combination of letters in quiet and sunny space, so that hanging motionless and without physical weight he seemed to watch the slow flowing of time beneath him, thinking *All I wanted was peace* thinking, "She ought not to started praying over me". (82)**

The foregoing passage gives us insight into why Joe Christmas murdered Joanna Burden–she would not give him peace. It does not clear up the question of Joe's racial identity. And Faulkner certainly doesn't offer any assistance in bridging the crevasse he has created in Joe's abstractness. Joe leaves behind Freedman Town, the white neighborhood and continues his wandering on a country road toward Joanna's house. He encounters a group of five or six Negroes coming toward him:

> **He was walking directly toward them, walking fast. They had seen him and they gave to one side of the road, the voices ceasing. . . . He could smell negro; he could smell cheap cloth and sweat. The head of the negro, higher than his own, seemed to stoop, out of the sky, against the sky. "It's a white man," he said, without turning his head, quietly. "What you want, whitefolks?" The voice was not threatful. Neither was it servile. (86)**

The Negroes in the street acknowledge him as a white man. He told Brown he was black. Joanna Burden wanted him to declare himself a Negro and she would send him to a law school for Negroes. Doc Hines labeled him a "nigger" at birth and later, in the white orphanage, told the others he was black. At the orphanage, the troubled little boy follows the Negro working in the school yard around. Curious, he asks him, "'How come you are a nigger?' and the nigger said, 'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' and he says, 'I ain't a nigger,' and the nigger says, 'You are worse than that. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont ever know'" (285).

The Negro's prophecy somewhat narrows the gap in the abstraction called Joe Christmas. Racial labels, black or white, can only be affixed to him through one's perception of him or, in the alternative, through his own pronouncement of his race. He told Brown he was a Negro. This statement precipitates the necessity for Joe to run for his life for it is Brown who informs the Sheriff they are looking for the Negro, Joe Christmas.

The days marking Joe's flight from the murder scene take an ironic twist in that, although he flees from the law, he stays relatively close to Jefferson. An irony also lies in the underlying tone his thoughts and actions take. The implication in the narration is that he wants to be caught and punished. Otherwise, why didn't he take off across the country? The hours he spent running toward the murder differ

from those spent running from it. The earlier ramblings were more spiritual or emotional. In those hours, he listened. In the latter he became more physical; he insinuated himself into people's lives. He did not pass by Negro cabins or white folks' houses quietly now. He knocked on doors or entered homes without knocking. He stormed into the evening service in a Negro Church, stood at the pulpit and raged against God. He physically shoved an old man and beat his grandson. His anger from all the years of frustration and searching for his lost being took its toll during these days. The days became so twisted and confused in his mind that he obsessed about what day it was. He entered a home not to ask for food but only to know the day. The lady told him it was Tuesday; he had killed Joanna on Friday. When he left that particular house, he began to run.

> He did not remember starting to run. He thought for awhile that he ran because of and toward some destination that the running had suddenly remembered and hence his mind did not need to bother to remember why he was running, since the running was not difficult. It was quite easy, in fact. He felt quite light, weightless. Even in full stride his feet seemed to stray slowly and lightly and at deliberate random across an earth without solidity, until he fell. Nothing tripped him. (247)

He had fallen asleep running. Tired and hungry, he ran with no sense of direction, pain, or emotions. Ironically, he is running in a Negro man's shoes–a pair of heavy brogans. He had exchanged the shoes with a black woman whose life

he disrupted; they are black and smell of Negro. The brogans become symbolic for the closest the reader and Joe Christmas may come to breaching the great gap in his existence:

> Looking down at the harsh, crude, clumsy shapelessness of them, he said "Hah" through his teeth. It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving. (245-246)

The black brogans, once worn by a black man, wield an important, metaphoric role in relation to Joe's existence. Faulkner describes them as harsh and crude with a "clumsy shapelessness" to them. Similarly, Joe's life has been harsh and crude and has certainly embodied a clumsy shapelessness. He and others have pushed and pulled him across a tightrope of racial indetermination from the moment he was abandoned as though he carried the weight of the heavy brogans with him throughout his thirty years. Faulkner draws the edges of the lacuna representing the abstraction of Joe Christmas in ever so slightly in the one word Joe utters as he studies the brogans: "Hah." The interjection, spoken through his teeth, demands the reader's attention. If we can assume Faulkner uses the word within the context of its accepted meaning as denoting amazement or wonder or triumph, then Joe has filled the gap–he has seemingly acknowledged and/or accepted the

label fastened to him at birth. The paragraph immediately following the above, lends credence to this theory:

> **It is just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. "That was all I wanted," he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. "That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in in thirty years". (246)**

Faulkner still offers no irrefutable answer to the mystery surrounding Joe's racial identity, only allusion and, more often than not, illusion. Contrary to the above, an argument might also be made that Joe's sensibilities, after running for so many days, are affected by his physical and emotional exhaustion. Volpe reinforces the theory that the reader must always be aware of Faulkner's writing style at all times:

> **Faulkner was perfectly capable of writing a simple, straightforward story; the vague references, ambiguities, avoidance of transitions, withholding of vital information are always deliberate. Faulkner's techniques may sometimes exasperate, but they are effective in compelling the reader to join in the writer's search for truth. (32)**

The brogans continue to be an issue with Joe as, on that last Friday, the day

of his capture, he hitches a ride on a wagon. He quietly thinks of where he has been and senses where he is going. He sits on the seat, thinking, ". . . with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and eradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves" (LIA 252).

An acceptance has also settled in on Joe; an acceptance of the abstract label of "nigger." His capture by a white man named Halliday in Mottstown was without incident. He simply walked up to Joe, asked him if he was Joe Christmas and Joe acknowledged he was:

> He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too (260).

Joe knows he's a murderer; his knowledge of his racial background, however, is another matter. He has run in circles for thirty years searching for an answer and, in the end, becomes only what he is branded. And, for the benefit of the good citizens of Mottstown and Jefferson, they now have the "nigger" who killed the white woman. A one-man vigilante committee in the person of Percy Grimm pronounces and carries out Joe's fate: Castration. He tells the complicated

human being, lying on the floor bleeding to death, "'Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell'" (345). Faulkner obfuscates even Joe's final moments:

> But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. (345-346)

Joe Christmas need run no longer. He has, hopefully, found in death what he wanted in life–peace. He lived and died without knowing his true identity. And neither does the reader.

The narrative in Light in August is relatively straightforward with flashbacks used to bring the past into the present and fragment time, with an omniscient narrator telling Joe's story. Faulkner shows a direct correlation between the disparaging word, "nigger," and the deed in the circumstances surrounding, Joanna's murder, Joe's flight and the ultimate mutilation by Percy Grimm. The irony in Joe's final minutes is that Addie Bundren's word-to-deed dichotomy exists with no gap. The lacuna known as Joe Christmas' life, however, is not filled.

The Lacuna of Resolution or Lack Thereof

Searching for narrative lacunae, holes, lacks, or gaps in Faulkner's and Morrison's fiction can certainly be expanded beyond the works I have discussed. The reader can turn to any number of either Faulkner or Morrison's novels and search for narrative lacunae or spaces. Who has not read the opening passage in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and failed to comprehend immediately that the thoughts are those of an idiot. Benjy has no comprehension of words and deeds and how they interact with each other. As in Light in August, Faulkner juxtaposes past and present only, in this novel, within Benjy's thoughts. From the opening lines of Section I, the reader must be constantly alert listening to Benjy and willing to fill in the gaps Faulkner presents in the persistent transitions between past and present as illusion in an idiot's mind.

The first reading of Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, which is as challenging as The Sound and the Fury, tends to lead the reader to believe he/she might be diagnosed as suffering from Benjy Compson's affliction. If, as Kazin described him, Joe Christmas is an abstraction, Thomas Sutpen can be considered a metaphor for mystery, ambition, and greed. Faulkner gives the reader insight into Sutpen's ambition and greed once he arrives in Jefferson through other characters' versions of him and his life. His past history opens the deepest lacuna in one of Faulkner's characters. Quentin Compson cannot explain Sutpen's history prior to

his materializing in Jefferson; he can, however, offer his version of Sutpen's coming into and being in the community: "*It seems that this demon–his name was Sutpen–(Colonel Sutpen)–Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation*" (Absalom 9).

Again, as he tells the story, Faulkner commingles the past with the present often making it difficult for the reader to fill in the holes. He not only puzzles the reader early in the story but also broadens the narrative gap with statements such as: [Sutpen] "married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children–the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride. . . . (11).

Volpe presents an excellent argument in favor of the theory that Faulkner demands reader participation, especially as it pertains to the Sutpen story:

> **The lack of chronology . . . serves to draw the reader into the world the narrators create by forcing him to participate in their search for meaning. . . . Though [the storytellers] know facts that the reader does not know, they do not have all the necessary details, and they are trying to establish connections, to discover motivations, to find meaning. . . . The reader is draw into the investigation. (190)**

Volpe also describes how Faulkner pulls the reader down into the lacunae, the gaps, he creates in the text through the language in Absalom:

> **. . . the reader feels himself caught up in a flow of language with a**

> current so strong that he cannot keep himself above the surface. He is pulled inexorably to a level below conscious thought, where chronological time is not important and word sounds convey feelings beyond rational expression. (190)

In addition to Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, Morrison's Jazz is an example of another of her works which offers excellent support of a discussion of narrative lacunae–Morrison's "lacks" or "spaces." In rhythmic language, she tells the story of Joe Trace, the cheating husband who ". . . fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going," and Violet, the betrayed wife who ". . . went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face . . . " (Jazz 3). The space–the lacuna–Morrison wants us, her readers, to fall into concerns the "why." Eusebio L. Rodrigues offers some insight in his essay, "Experiencing Jazz:" "That the whole of Jazz resonates becomes clear only after we slowly discover how to respond to its rhythms. Then sentences sing, then adjectives turn into breathless run-ons." He adds later that: ". . . Morrison transposes into another medium the music that sprang out of her people and expressed their joys, their sorrow, their beliefs, their psyche" (248).

A rhythmic, moving passage, reminiscent of Faulkner's long, stream-of-consciousness narration, and told through one of Violet's interior monologues, emphasizes the effect of the music on the characters. Violet, sitting in a malt shop

with a malt that "was soup now" retraces the time prior to Dorcas' death and her violating the body:

> **[Did he] Take her to Indigo on Saturday and sit way back so they could hear the music wide and be in the dark at the same time, at one of those round tables with a slick black top and a tablecloth of pure white on it, drinking rough gin with that sweet red stuff in it so it looked like soda pop, which a girl like her should have ordered instead of liquor she could sip from the edge of a glass wider at the mouth than at its base, with a tiny stem like a flower in between while her hand, the one that wasn't holding the glass shaped like a flower, was under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, ... (95)**

In Jazz, the time element is traced and retraced in a rhythmic pattern with a jazz or blues beat. The rhythm of the narrator's language is syncopated with the rhythm of the music as seen in Dorcas' "drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh . . . " (95). The narrator explains the effect of the music on the people: "Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts. Lower and lower, until the music was so lowdown you had to shut your windows and just suffer the summer heat" (57).

The challenge of closing Morrison's narrative spaces in Jazz may seem less challenging that those in other texts discussed herein. If we obligingly say that the

rhythm of the music is the force that brings any lacunae together, the assumption would be well founded. However, a close reading of the text shows the conflicts and tragedies of city life in the era when the music "dropped to places below the sash." When the reader has turned the last page of Jazz, his/her experience with the text can be further enhanced by listening to Toni Morrison on tape, reading the book. The experience is exhilarating in that one can sense the rhythm of the beauty and tragedy through Morrison's low, modulated voice.

Kazin contends that, in Light in August, "Language never quite comes up to the meaning of events" and adopts a Faulkner phrase, "it is not that, or that " (SLIA 258). Whether we define the terms as lacunae, "not that, or that," or Morrison's "holes," or Faulkner's "lacks," through their narrative styles, Faulkner and Morrison leave the words and meaning sublimated deep within the heart–deep within the actions and the text. If the words should break out through the sheer lining, the pain they would bring to the surface would transcend their meaning. Admittedly, they create lacunae, gaps, lacks, spaces and holes which often turns into great chasms or deep crevasses, in their narratives for the reader to slide down into. They rely upon their readers to pull meaning from out of the narrative lacunae and bring their imaginations into the text. Provided, of course, the reader is not an idiot. Or, they take Faulkner's advice: "Read it four times."

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